

CONTEMPORARY TURKEY: AVOIDING THE MISTAKES OF POST-WWII VIETNAM

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**CONTEMPORARY TURKEY:
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CONTEMPORARY TURKEY: AVOIDING THE MISTAKES OF POST-WWII VIETNAM

Every city's sounds are unique--like a person's thumbprint. The call to prayer woke me on my first day back in too many years. My room overlooked the road that travelled between the tourist area of the Aya Sophia Mosque and the neighborhood down by the turquoise blue Bosphorus waterfront. The summer day's rays beamed down on me, the heat oppressive even for someone from the South. The streets bustled with locals headed to market. Business owners beckoned with their unique call "Yes Please!" Restaurants advertised their daily specials and Turkish delight decorated window fronts. This was the Istanbul I remembered. I sipped my hot Nescafe coffee watching the locals move through their day. But I was struck by Turkey's change, evident immediately in fashion. The European and Western influence I remembered remained-- but there was more: women who flaunted their Islamic beliefs dressed chicly in their long pants and skirts with stylish trench coats, their hair covered in finely made silk scarves like Jackie Onassis, designer sunglasses perched on their perfectly brown faces. Fashion showed where this new generation of Turks had settled culturally and geopolitically—finely balanced between progressive and chic European influence and Turkey's Islamic culture.

—Adele Ratcliff
Istanbul, Turkey 2010

My first visit to Turkey in 2002 was a brief two-day business trip. I was immediately captivated by the texture and blend of Turkey's culture. I didn't expect Turkish men and women to be dressed similarly to those in other European countries I had visited. Just as notable was the absence of the traditional Islamic attire I observed in TV broadcasts from other Islamic countries. My first visit created a desire for a longer experience of a fascinating country. My impressions of Turkey upon my return in July 2010 for a two-week vacation prompted me to contemplate Turkey's evolution since my initial visit in 2002.

U.S.-Turkish tensions reached new heights when Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Iran in 2009 and proclaimed that Turkey favored continuing diplomacy over economic sanctions to resolve the controversy over Iran's nuclear

program.¹ Though the October 2010 Turkish-Brazilian-Iranian uranium swap for the development of peaceful energy was similar to the deal the U.S. was working through the United Nations in September 2009 when Iran backed away from the deal, it did not prevent the U.S. from publically criticizing Turkey's efforts.² Some critics believed that Turkey and Brazil were acting in accord with U.S. wishes and interests. But public U.S. criticism embarrassed Turkey and brought an immediate rebuke from Prime Minister Erdogan: He charged countries that criticize "were merely envious."³ Turkey would vote "no" for additional economic sanctions against Iran.⁴

For many U.S. foreign policy analysts, this was the latest in a series of events suggesting Turkey is turning from a pro-West and U.S. alliance towards a Middle East Islamic alliance. More broadly, critics point to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's ties to a hard-line Justice and Development (AKP) Islamic Party; his domestic policies that challenge the historical safeguards for a secular government, including support for increased Islamic expression, and stronger civilian control over the military; and his renewed relationships with old enemies, including Iran and Syria. These developments, taken collectively, could indeed portend a strategic shift in Turkey's geopolitical orientation that, from a Western perspective, is understandably troubling.

However, rapidly changing events in the Middle East and the recent domino-effect popular uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen underscore the need for the U.S. to proceed cautiously before we declare Turkey "lost" or teetering on the brink of a political Islamic orientation. The United States should consider whether the lens through which we view today's environment is clear and provides an accurate picture of Turkey's political and ideological leanings. Do the stains of the horrific 9/11

attacks and ten years of war on terrorism now dangerously cloud or distort that view? Given the strategic importance of a strong and enduring U.S. relationship with Turkey, it is vital that we maintain a clear, accurate, and balanced view of Turkey--one that carefully considers the current environment in the broad context of historical, cultural, and political factors that have shaped this environment.

This Strategy Research Paper (SRP) argues Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and contemporary Turkey are analogous to Ho Chi Minh and post-WWII Vietnam when U.S. leaders, jaded by a myopic concern over communist expansion, failed to understand Ho Chi Minh's communist ties and his true motivations for an independent Vietnam. Similarly, the United States is now looking through a lens characterized by analogous concerns for expansion of Islamic extremism and is thus at risk of misreading Turkey's motivations. To avoid the mistakes of Vietnam and to accurately assess Prime Minister Erdogan's motivations and Turkey's new policies, U.S. leaders should carefully assess how Turkey's Ottoman Empire history and geostrategic position between Europe, Russia, and the Middle East have uniquely shaped Turkey's secular government, its Cold War posture, and its motivations in a post Cold War environment.

Mostly for reasons of national security, Turkey has been a strong U.S. ally since World War II⁵ and a NATO member since 1952.⁶ But the changing geostrategic landscape since the end of the Cold War and tragic events of 9/11 have transformed Turkey's foreign policy and its approach to conducting business with surrounding neighbors. Turkey's growing regional influence is changing the regional dynamics.

Turkey no longer automatically defers to the United States on policies that affect its region. However, Turkey is surely not “lost.”

The lessons from Vietnam should be considered in context of the currently evolving U.S.-Turkish relations, where the stakes are equally high. The United States should heed the lessons of Vietnam and avoid further weakening diplomatic relations with Turkey. Latent antagonisms could potentially crystallize an anti-American stronghold where none currently exists. This SRP will provide a brief background of Vietnam as an analogous backdrop from which to view Turkey’s rise from the Ottoman Empire and geostrategic position as a shaping factor of Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy in the pre- and post-Cold War environment. The United States can identify common interests to strengthen its historical bond with a critical ally. Otherwise, we could lose Turkey.

Vietnam - A Relevant Historical Analogy

While not identical to today’s geostrategic environment, a recollection of post-World War II Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh’s leadership should be a strategic consideration in the context of discussions about contemporary U.S-Turkish relations.

Committed to a free Vietnam and inspired by the nationalist pride instilled in him by his father, Ho Chi Minh petitioned the 1919 Paris Peace Conference for democratic reforms in his colonial Vietnam at the conclusion of World War I.⁷ When his petition was rejected, Ho aligned himself with the communist party and spent more than twenty years travelling through Asia as a revolutionary. Deeply committed to a free Vietnam, Ho returned in 1940 to couple a “democratic” reform platform with nationalism and defeat rival nationalist groups that seemed more willing to fight each other than the enemy. French and Japanese exploitation, poor economic conditions, and a massive

famine fueled anger towards the occupiers and enabled Ho to mobilize the populous to overthrow French occupation.⁸

Ho had become “the voice of Vietnam,” but the French would not go easily. Reeling from its fall as a world power during World War II, France was determined to recover its Indo-Chinese colonies. The South contained valuable natural and economic resources that both Ho and France coveted. A negotiated settlement seemed impossible. Then in 1946, with both sides confident of victory, France launched a war with Ho and the Vietminh.⁹

Rich with natural resources, China and Southeast Asia were major suppliers of critical raw materials such as rubber, tin, and oil. Recognizing the region’s strategic importance and aware of Japan’s need for these resources, Franklin Roosevelt sought to strengthen the economic partnerships between the United States and China and increase access to French Indochina. Roosevelt never believed in France’s ability to successfully re-colonize the region, but he also viewed the Vietnamese as inferior and incapable of governing.¹⁰ When Allied victory seemed imminent during WWII Roosevelt supported an independent Vietnam and Ho’s followers contributed to U.S. efforts to recover downed U.S. pilots in the region.¹¹

A new global threat emerged at the conclusion of World War II, communism. In 1945, pressured by British fear of losing its own colonies and not wanting to rile an ally against Soviet expansion, Roosevelt moved to a more neutral position in Indochina. However, after Roosevelt’s death in 1945, only one color shaped successor Harry S Truman’s perspective—the bright red of communism. Truman’s administration viewed Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union as the most powerful nation in Europe and Asia.

Truman's foreign policy was shaped by this fear that would cast its shadow on US foreign policy for decades.

Truman feared communist expansion and placed the highest priority on promoting governments that could hold the line against communist expansion. Preventing the fall of Western Europe to communism was the new hard line for the U.S. All other foreign policy issues would be viewed in this context. The French geopolitical position in Europe as a bulwark against communist expansion would trump any concerns in Asia.¹²

Firmly entrenched as the leader in Vietnam's fight for independence Ho sought support for a sovereign Vietnam from the Truman administration, citing strategic advantages for the U.S.¹³ However, Truman's fear of Soviet expansion so influenced his foreign policy, that Ho's historical ties to the Soviet Union were misinterpreted. After China fell to communism in 1949, Truman refused to align himself with any leader with even the slightest ties to Russia or China.¹⁴ As a result, Ho's plea to the U.S. fell on deaf ears. He then had no choice but to turn to his historical enemy to the north, Mao Zedong's new communist China.¹⁵ This new alignment, perceived by Truman as a formidable Moscow-China-Vietnam link,¹⁶ would cause Truman to support France's effort to re-colonize Vietnam to stem the cascading effects of global communism.¹⁷

Almost paranoid about Soviet expansion and the globalization of communism, post-WWII U.S. leaders ignored Vietnam's long history and rising nationalistic struggle for independence, so they misinterpreted Ho Chi Minh's motivations and ignored conditions that gave rise to Ho. In effect, the United States treated Vietnam as a potential ally in a critical region for another--France. These geostrategic miscalculations,

fueled by domestic politics, caused the U.S. to lose an opportunity in a region deemed critical in the fight against communism. Accurately assessing Ho Chi Minh and his motivations could have led to U.S. cultivation of a critical regional ally. Instead the miscalculations eventually plunged the U.S. into what would then become the nation's longest war. When contemplating the U.S. rejection of Ho's request for U.S. support, Abbot Low Moffat, chief of the U.S. Division of Southeast Asian Affairs in Vietnam in 1947, concluded "a concern about Communist expansion...led to a fixation...that affected our objective analysis of certain problems."¹⁸ Today the fixation has shifted to terrorism, but the lack of objectivity remains.

The Ottoman Empire and It's Ultimate Collapse

Like Vietnam's long centuries of struggle from colonization and oppression, Turkey's secular government and political history are burdened by Ottoman colonization and oppressive rule that casts its shadow today. Thus, to accurately characterize Turkey's contemporary domestic and foreign policy, U.S. leaders should understand how Turkey's 600-plus years in the Ottoman Empire have shaped Turkey's secular government, its Cold War posture, and it's motivations in a post-Cold War environment. With this new perspective, U.S. leaders can understand how Turkey's transformation can align with U.S. interests in promoting democracy and curtailing political Islam. Indeed Turkey's secular government has recently included greater Islamic participation in that government. But this troubling development is a consequence of democratic processes. Like the United States, Turkey is embracing freedom of religion.

The Ottoman Empire flourished under a series of Sultans. At the height of the Empire, its conquests spanned central Europe, North Africa, the Caucasus region, and east into Eurasia. By the end of the 19th century, the Empire was challenged by

nationalist uprisings in its territories (1908-1922) and was forced to cede independence to many of them. The collapse of the Empire left Turkey surrounded by countries with historical grievances against Ottoman Turkey, including Iraq (A.D. 1516)¹⁹ and Syria (A.D. 1534).²⁰ Grievances of Turkey's northern enemy, Russia, extended back to the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and rise of the Ottoman Empire (A.D. 1453).²¹ By WW1 Turkey was surrounded by its former conquests. So the last remnant of the Empire aligned itself with Germany--and lost. The victors sought to permanently dispense with the Ottoman threat by carving the Ottoman Empire into bite-size pieces--keeping the better parts of the Empire for themselves and leaving only what is currently central Turkey for the Turks.²²

As a one-man force, General Kemal Ataturk led a nationalist effort to free and transform Turkey from Ottoman rule and to avert the planned partitioning of his beloved country. Following some military exercises, a German military observer complimented Ataturk on his martial skills. Kemal replied they would be valuable only if he could use them to free his people of the "fanatics and intellectual slavery" of the Sultan Islamic rule.²³ After Turkey's defeat in WWI, Ataturk seized his chance when he literally drove the British and Greeks from the shores of Turkey, shouting to his soldiers, "I am not ordering you to attack, I am ordering you to die!"²⁴ Kemal thereby abruptly denied the West's efforts to carve Turkey into bite-size pieces to be distributed among the winners of WWI. Witness to the success European countries achieved by casting off religious oppression, Ataturk dispensed with the final remnants of the Ottoman Empire's 600-year reign of oppression and provincialism when he separated the Caliphate from the Sultan, thereby ending Islamic rule in Turkey.²⁵

His country was in ruins and Turkey's people were illiterate and submissive after centuries of bowing to the Sultan. It was clear Turkey was not immediately capable of supporting a democratic state--but it would be a secular one. Kemal set the conditions for Turkey's modern transformation. In 1923, Kemal imposed a republican government and sought to radically purge Turkey of the Islamic chains and traditions that prevented her from being a more progressive country like other European states. For his efforts, his people renamed Kemal: He would become Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, "father" of modern Turkey (1923-1938).²⁶

The accounts from this influential period in Turkey's history--the multi-directional conquests and affronts to sovereignty across its highly exposed geography, the fights to avoid partitioning, and the adoption of a secular orientation to establish some basis for commonality and eventual growth and European integration--are important historical ingredients of this country's unique DNA. These factors must be understood and appreciated even today if effective relations with Turkey remain a strategic goal. Equally if not more important is the post-Ottoman period that brought Turkey into the modern world, discussed next.

Republic of Turkey- A Struggle to Transform 1919-1991

The Republic of Turkey rose from with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919. Turkey's international and domestic transformation since 1919 can be characterized as a series of struggles to increase human rights and to integrate into the regional and global economy. Fiercely protective of the new republic, the Turkish military-Ataturk's vanguards known as "Kemalist"-isolated Turkey and sought to extinguish any group or any religious or political movement that threatened to tear apart what remained of Turkey or drag it back into fanatical Islamic rule. Human rights and

freedoms would not be permitted to endanger the existence of the Turkish state.

Minority nationalistic struggles of Armenian, Greek, and Kurdish freedom fighters often felt the Turkish military's violent rejections of their causes.

Democratic principles including freedom of religion and the right to dissent without fear of retribution would have to wait decades until the Vanguardists were certain these freedoms would not lead to Islamic rule. Civilian Prime Ministers that pushed too hard for Islamic freedoms or allowed chaos to reign found themselves ousted by military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980.²⁷ Following the 1980 coup, nearly 30,000 suspected dissidents were arrested, ranging from students to politicians of all persuasions. Turkey suffered from international accusations of human rights violations, political repression, and imprisonment without due process.²⁸ Turkey's domestic practices would encroach on human rights and democratic processes that alienated Turkey from European community.

The fallout from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish concerns, and fear of Islamic rule would cast their shadows and shape 20th century Turkish foreign policy as well. Territorial losses from the Ottoman Empire left Turkey's military, economy, and political systems deficient. Paranoid from WWI and surrounded by enemies, Atatürk and the inheritors of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principles pursued an isolationist and neutrality strategy from the Republic of Turkey's inception in 1923. Atatürk sought to purge his country of nationalist movements that could be exploited by external actors and divide his country. Hatred and suspicions prevailed in post-WWI Turkey. In response to mass atrocities on both sides, nearly 1.5 million Greek Orthodox and nearly 500,000 Turkish Muslims were uprooted and returned to their "home" countries during a

population exchange agreement signed in 1932 at the request of both Turkish and Greek leaders during the “Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations.”²⁹ Today, Kayakoy, a Greek Orthodox town in southwest Turkey, sits in decay—never resettled by Turks after the exchange. Turkey’s post-WWI and Cold War strategic alliances with the West countered threats from Ottoman Empire enemies or WWI victors who sought to lay waste to Turkey--Armenia, Greece, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Russia, and the Balkans. Turkey signed a series of neutrality agreements and remained neutral in WWII until 1945.³⁰

Turkish-Russian relations deteriorated when Russia turned on Turkey in 1945, denouncing its partnership with Turkey and demanding control of The Turkish Straits, which gave Russia its access to the Black Sea.³¹ Fearing the Soviet threat, Turkey aligned itself with the United States and NATO (1952).³² Turkey’s geostrategic position at the confluence of Europe, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East made it a natural ally for and bulwark against Soviet expansion and the globalization of communism. Turkey’s foreign policy benefited it domestically as well. Turkey was introduced to economic benefits of foreign policy under the Truman Doctrine, when Turkey received an average of \$243 million per year to bolster its military and redevelop its infrastructure.³³ Even so, this cooperative relationship has had its share of strains.

The Cold War would be a tumultuous time for Turkey. Both domestically and internationally Turkey struggled to build a participatory government and reintegrate itself internationally. The U.S.-Turkish relationship was strained in the 1960s following the Cuban Missile Crisis and again during the Turkey-Cyprus crisis in the 1970s. As U.S.-Soviet tensions relaxed, Turkey no longer perceived the USSR as an imminent threat.

Consequently Turkey, still tethered to the United States, began to assert a foreign policy that was increasingly independent of the United States. Turkey expanded its foreign policy to bolster its economy. It cautiously re-established ties with the Soviet Union, based on energy and trade. The Soviet Union contributed nearly \$1 billion in foreign aid to Turkey during 1972 and 1975.³⁴ The European Community replaced the United States as Turkey's largest trade partner. However, Turkey's expanded foreign policy was not limited to the West.

Turkey likewise sought to decouple its regional policy from the West. Turkey's foreign policy moved from isolation to neutrality. Turkey engaged the Middle East with new energy and trade partnerships. Turkey developed a growing dependence on Middle East oil and sought to offset the trade imbalance with exports, which increased from \$60 million in 1970 to \$2.8 billion in 1985.³⁵ To avoid jeopardizing newly formed Middle East partnerships, Turkey's military was limited in the Middle East to humanitarian and NATO functions only. With these regional initiatives, Turkey at times challenged U.S. policy in the region.³⁶

Turkey permitted the United States and NATO to conduct only humanitarian activities on its soil. Turkey remained neutral during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Both Iran and Iraq were heavily dependent on Turkey economically. Consequently Turkey walked a fine line during the Iraq-Iran war in 1980.³⁷ Turkey refused to cooperate with U.S. efforts to free its hostages. Fearing Iran's isolation would push them into a Soviet alliance, Turkey refused to support a U.S. trade embargo against Iran in 1980.³⁸ Turkey was sympathetic to the Palestine Liberation Organization and mostly critical of Israel until the 1980s.³⁹

U.S.-Turkish relations endured but were strained until the 1980s when the changing strategic environment once again placed the U.S.-Turkish relationship on firmer ground. The United States and Turkey were anxious about Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and the growing political Islamic movement in Iran. Based on these shared interests, the U.S.-Turkish relationship would remain strong through the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the end of the Cold War and the 1991 Gulf war would set the stage for Turkey's current reformation. This emerging Turkey would collide with a new geostrategic environment in 2001.

The Collapse of the Cold War—Effect on Foreign and Domestic Policy

The collapse of the Cold War ushered in a new period of uncertainty for Turkey. Turkey's stability and Cold War identity as NATO's bulwark against the Soviet Union evaporated. Turkey found itself surrounded by uncertainty: former satellite Soviet states re-emerging in the Caucasus region, Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) unrest from Iran and Syria, and its long standing dispute with Greece. Just as Ho sought an alliance with the United States based on Vietnam's strategic importance, Turkey sought to affirm the importance of the U.S.-Turkish alliance. To consolidate its strategic importance as a "western stronghold in the Middle East," Turkish President Turgut Ozal supported the 1991 U.S.-led Gulf War.⁴⁰ The move effectively ended Turkey's Middle East neutrality and moved Turkey into active engagements around its borders.

Turkey used its linguistic and Ottoman past to develop economic and political ties with countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Turkey saw itself as the region's gateway to Europe. In 1991 Turkey launched the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone to increase free trade in the region.⁴¹ Similarly, the United States supported Turkey's aspirations to become a prominent player in an energy corridor from the

Caspian region and supported the development of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline running through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Turkey upgraded its alliance with Israel in 1991 to gain a partner in the fight against the PKK, Syria, and Greece. It also solidified its U.S. partnership in the new environment. Likewise, the United States strengthened its regional alliance with Israel and Turkey.

Turkey increasingly relied upon economic links to provide regional stability in the post-Cold War environment. Its economic growth was inextricably linked to external dependence. Exports grew from \$13 billion in 1990 to \$31 billion in 1998. Tourism reaped \$7.2 billion and remittances from Turkish workers abroad reaped \$5.7 billion. In 1990, the European Community accounted for 46 percent of Turkey's trade, compared to the Soviet Union's 5 percent. By 1998, trade from the former Soviet Union, Commonwealth of Independent States accounted for nearly 13 percent.⁴² Turkey's military benefited from Israeli advanced weaponry, technology transfer and joint military exercises. Free trade nearly doubled from \$407 million in 1995 to \$761 million in 1998.⁴³ Foreign trade influenced foreign policy.

Like Turkey's foreign policy, Turkey's domestic landscape was quickly transforming as well. Turkey's foreign affairs were previously unimpeded by domestic unrest during the 70s. Turkey emerged from authoritarian rule in the 80s into a multi-party democracy that aspired to be more integrated internationally into the West. Under President Turgut Ozal's leadership (1983 -1993) Turkey initiated institutional and business reforms, opened Turkey's economy to international competition, and sought financial cooperation to further Turkey's development. Domestic progress was now firmly reflected in Turkey's foreign policy.

Economics was a key component of Turkey's foreign policy. Faced with high unemployment and inflation, an increasing middle and upper income gap, and pressures from domestic business associations, Turkey applied for European Union membership in 1987.⁴⁴ It was initially denied in 1989 because of human rights issues, lack of democratic progress, and an immature economic infrastructure. Nevertheless, Turkey maintained its goal of Western integration and was rewarded when the EU accession discussions were restarted in 1992.⁴⁵ However, despite domestic reforms, Ozal was unable to retain power during Turkey's wave of high inflation and unemployment. Repeated weak government leadership during the 1990s weakened Turkey institutionally. Turkey's current Prime Minister Erdogan has revived the reform and restored Turkey's regional influence. But Erdogan's initiatives have understandably caused concern within the West.

Contemporary Turkey

Critics have pointed to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's ties to an Islamic party, his domestic policies that encroach on the secular government, and his renewed relationships with Iran and Syria as indications that Turkey is moving from a pro-Western alliance. However, this perspective ignores Turkey's past foreign policy evolution during the collapse of the Cold War. It is also blind to Erdogan's rise to power.

Like Ho Chi Minh, Erdogan parlayed his charismatic personality and skillfully organized grass-roots movements into national groundswells. Turkey's economy was failing in the wake of a November 2000 banking crisis and a February 2001 currency crisis. The Turkish Lira had plummeted 33 percent in a single day. Unemployment soared near 30 percent.⁴⁶ Weak governments during the 1990s left Turkey susceptible to corruption from political elites.

Erdogan capitalized on a populist counter-elite attitude and growing support for increased rights to self-govern.⁴⁷ Erdogan's Islamic beliefs made it easy for him to lash himself to the strongest party, a new conservative Islam Justice and Development Party (AKP-the reconstituted version of the banned hard line pro-Islamic Fazilet Partisi [Virtue Party]).⁴⁸ Further, he distanced himself from the corruption of the secular Turkish ruling parties. Erdogan appealed to those who were locked out from the elite political class. He secured a 34 percent plurality vote by riding a wave of public disgust for corruption scandals among ruling parties and economic collapse. Additionally, the AKP won 66 percent of the General National Assembly seats in this election, giving Erdogan maneuver room to continue Turkey's transformation.⁴⁹

The AKP had a clear path to majority rule when five other parties failed to secure the minimum 10 percent threshold required to enter parliament, including the current administration's party, which gained just 5 percent of the vote. Turkey's oldest party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), garnered just 19 percent of the vote.⁵⁰ The CHP had not run in the previous election. The rise of Erdogan and the AKP was facilitated by the faltering economy, a greater factor than Islamic support.⁵¹ His election was an indictment of the previous ruling party and social elites.⁵² The 2002 vote was a mandate for change.

Prime Minister Erdogan has continued Turkey's domestic reformation process begun under Turgut Ozal during his tenure as Prime Minister and President (1983-1993). The reforms, required for EU accession, have been supported by the United States and the European Community.⁵³ Under his leadership, economic reforms-including fiscal discipline, an overhaul of the financial oversight sector, political stability

from eight years of AKP majority rule, EU accession negotiations and greater confidence in managing the economy - helped Turkey weather the recent global crisis. These dramatic economic reforms ushered in unprecedented economic growth. Turkey weathered the 2008 global crisis better than most in the region. The banking sector, a source of instability in the early 2000s, was a source of stability during the 2008 decline. Growth is resuming and unemployment is stabilized at around 10 percent.⁵⁴

Erdogan presided over a 58% approval vote for the September 2010 constitution reformation referendum needed to continue EU accession. Designed to further Turkey's transformation, it included key provisions for gender equality, protection of personal data and right to privacy, and subordinating the military to civilian leadership. To provide more democratic rule, the referendum intentionally weakened the military influence within the state.⁵⁵

While the referendum was heralded as a key step to complete EU accession, Erdogan and the AKP's implementation of the changes has been questionable. Turkey dropped 20 points in the Press Freedom Index in 2009 because Erdogan has shown little tolerance of journalists and media outlets critical of his policies.⁵⁶ Both the Supreme Court and military have felt his wrath when they refused to support his positions.⁵⁷ His public rebuke to opposition extends into the international community as well. Both Israel and the United States have been the target of Erdogan's bravado. Erdogan's controversial push to lift the ban on head scarves in schools, Islamic connections, a growing Islamic identification among Turks, and overly strong reactions to those who oppose his positions have created anxiety among U.S. observers. Despite these

concerns, Erdogan's leadership during his eight-year tenure has been critical to Turkey's rapid transformation and rise as a regional power.

Likewise, the EU accession process has had a positive disciplining effect on Turkey's domestic reformation, its pro-West alliance in foreign policy, and its focus for foreign trade. As with past decades, though, the waxing and waning of Europe's view of Turkey's importance in the changing geo-political environment has also influenced Turkey's foreign policy. Most recently, the apathetic or waning support from Germany and France in support of Turkey's EU accession in a post-9/11 environment has forced Turkey to once again turn to partners beyond Europe.⁵⁸ Using its successful foreign policy in the 1990s, Turkey has strengthened its relationships with Russia, Syria, and Iran through increased economic and energy ties. Turkey's growing economy requires increased energy from outside sources. Europe's declining economy has caused Turkey to seek new markets to continue its economic growth. Russia now outpaces Europe as Turkey's primary trading partner and primary energy source.⁵⁹

In an effort to increase its regional influence, Turkey has leveraged its Ottoman linguistic and cultural ties to improve relationships with Armenia and other Caucasus countries. It has also found common ground with old enemies on the Kurdish problem. Fear of a Kurdish independent state fueled Turkish-U.S. tensions prior to the Iraq War in 2003 and initiated a shift in Turkey's foreign policy.⁶⁰ Syria, Turkey, and Iran now share a common interest in containing Kurdish nationalist insurgents. Turkey and Iran now share intelligence information and coordinate strike operations against Kurdish sanctuaries;⁶¹ Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq

have cooperated on military operations against PKK training camps;⁶² Russia and Turkey cooperate on the PKK and Russia's insurgent Chechen rebels.⁶³

Turkey has used the Kurdish issue as a vehicle for expanded military, economic, and intelligence cooperation among its neighbors. Turkey and Iraq established the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council and proceeded to sign more than 40 bilateral agreements. Turkey finances nearly 90 percent of Iraq's construction sector Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).⁶⁴ The opening of the Turkish consulate in Arbil, Iraq indicates more normal relations with the Kurdish Workers Group.⁶⁵ Iran is now a major supplier of Turkey's natural gas, and Turkish companies were recently awarded opportunities to develop Iranian natural gas fields.⁶⁶ Exports to Iran increased from \$10B in 2008 to a projected \$20B in 2011--nearly twice Turkey's trade with the US and Israel combined.⁶⁷ A visa-free policy for Iranian travelers brings more than one million Iranian middle-class tourists annually to Turkey, an effort to offset the trade imbalance.⁶⁸ Russia now supplies 70 percent of Turkey's natural gas and 40 percent of its oil; Russia is now a major foreign investor (\$10B of FDI in 2008).⁶⁹ Russia has replaced Germany as Turkey's largest trading partner. Turkish firms completed 59 projects in Russia valued at \$3.6B in 2008; Turkey estimates tourism from Russia contributed more than \$40B between 1996 and 2006.⁷⁰

While Turkey's foreign policy has supported its long-standing quest for peace on its borders, it is not without discourse. The Turkey-Israel relationship, established to offset the Syria-Greece-Russian bloc, has changed rapidly as their interests collided. Turkey remains focused on the Kurdish insurgency and on its ambition to be a regional influence; Israel, on the other hand, remains preoccupied with its own security and

perceives Turkey's friendly relations with Syria as endorsement of Syria's support for Hamas and Hezbollah. There is growing belief within Turkey that Israel is supporting the PKK insurgency in order to destabilize Syria and Iran.⁷¹ However, despite tensions, in an effort to play a larger regional role, Turkey has taken the lead on brokering conversation between Israel and its hostile neighbors - including Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas.⁷²

Turkey's lead role has wedged the Turks between a rock and a hard place of competing national interests. Their relations plummeted when Turkey thought Israel failed to negotiate in good faith to resolve tensions in the Gaza Strip in 2008. Turkey claimed it had successfully negotiated a peaceful resolution when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert pledged that Israel did not intend to use military force. Five days later Israel launched a three-week military offensive, killing more than 1,400 Palestinians. Embarrassed and angered, Turkey suspended its mediation of Syrian-Israeli negotiations. Relations further declined in 2010 when the Turkish vessel *Mavi Marmara*, seeking to deliver aid to the Gaza strip, attempted to penetrate an Israeli blockade and was boarded by Israeli troops. Nine Turkish civilians were killed.⁷³

While Turkey has supported U.S. policy efforts in the region, including providing military support in Iraq in 1991, the Balkans,⁷⁴ and Afghanistan,⁷⁵ Turkey's foreign policy to enhance security and economic ties has at times placed them at odds with U.S. regional policies. Turkey's contemporary foreign policy parallels its 1960s Middle East policy, refusing to support international positions that adversely affect Turkey's economy or threaten its security.

Turkey lost billions in trade and a valuable energy source during the 1991 Gulf War. Additionally, the No-Fly zone following the 1991 Gulf War precipitated Kurdish unrest in Turkey's southeastern region. Turkish Cold War security ties were again threatened during the 2003 Iraq War when U.S. national interests were at odds with Turkey's.⁷⁶ Turkish leaders were concerned the war would have economic impacts and amplify unrest among Turkish Kurds and encourage their calls for an independent state.⁷⁷ Opinion polls showed 90 percent of the Turkish population was opposed to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.⁷⁸ Turkey then denied U.S. requests for the Army's 4th Infantry Division to proceed through Turkey and invade Iraq from the north.⁷⁹

Consistent with Turkey's foreign policy approach initiated during the Cold War, Turkey's contemporary economic and energy dependence have prompted Turkey's pursuit of a more diplomatic approach to regional issues. Turkey's reluctance to support the U.S. position on increased Iranian economic sanctions and refusal to isolate Syria economically are directly related to Turkey's economic policies. Like Germany and France, Turkey did not speak out publically against Russia's military incursion into Georgia.⁸⁰ Turkey feared that, in retaliation, Russia would choke off critical energy supplies in retribution.⁸¹ Instead, Turkey flew to Moscow in an effort to seek quick resolution and encourage Moscow not to move towards Tbilisi.⁸²

Implications to U.S. Regional Policy

Contemporary Turkey views itself as a bridge between the West and the Islamic world. This view is consistent with Ataturk's vision of a globally integrated country. Turkey's movement from neutrality to engagement in the 1990s in the Middle East signaled Turkey's desire to become a Western stronghold in the Middle East. Turkey's active engagement to resolve regional disputes between Syria and Israel, Israel and the

Palestinians, and to act as a pathway to Iran for international diplomacy signals Turkey's rising regional influence.

This view is reflected in Turkey's efforts to cultivate peace through common national security and economic interests with its regional neighbors. Turkey is using diplomacy and economics, along with military cooperation, in pursuit of its national interests. Turkey's contemporary peace-through-economics model is consistent with its Cold War model and has been consistently applied along its border - in its trade and energy policies.

The U.S. and Turkey have shared interests in Turkey's EU accession, in promoting Turkey as a regional energy partner, in promoting democracy, in enhancing regional stability, in countering political Islam, and in increasing access to critical resources in the region. Turkey has demonstrated progressive leadership in Iraq and Afghanistan, providing a good example for fledgling Islamic democracies. Their renewed relationships with Iran and Syria, their new relationships with Hamas and Hezbollah, and their courage to step out and lead in a volatile region by brokering dialogue between hostile parties makes them a valuable supporter of U.S. regional interests. Likewise, should another Georgian-like incident arise, Turkey's warm relationship with Russia offers a pathway for regional leverage until U.S.-Russian relations are reset.

The U.S.-Turkish alliance has always been built based primarily on security. The relationship at times has been at the expense of democratic processes. The Turkish military's heavy hand in preserving secularism has come, at times, at the expense of human rights. Though in today's environment emerging freedoms understandably cause

concern, Turkey's emerging tolerance for increased religious expression is consistent with democratic advocacy of freedom of religion and free discourse.

However this alliance has endured despite, at times, conflicting national interests. Just as Turkey has done during its previous transformations, as Turkey matures its democratic processes and expands its regional influence, the U.S. can expect Turkey to differ on its ways or approaches to achieving those shared national interests. But those differences should not prompt critics to question the value of sustaining positive relations with such a country. While U.S.-Turkish relations have been strained recently, the partnership has endured similar strains under changing geostrategic conditions. Turkey's swift transformation as a maturing democracy provides new opportunities for the U.S.-Turkish relationship. Three key initiatives could strengthen the relationship and send a clear signal that Turkey is a strong and vital Western stronghold in a critical region, the United States should:

- **Actively support for EU accession:** Turkey desires to be a part of Europe and the West. France's and Germany's lack of support since 9/11 has forced Turkey to develop economic and security ties elsewhere. EU integration could permanently anchor Turkey to the West.
- **Increase Trade:** Turkey's foreign policy is inextricably linked to foreign trade to support Turkey's continued transformation. Its recent Middle East trade partnerships outpace its trade with the United States. The United States should increase trade to provide healthy competition and reduce influence from other trading partners.

- Facilitate Repair of the Israel-Turkish Relationship: Syria and Iran regard Turkey as a credible diplomatic partner. Turkey seeks to increase its influence and own security by playing an active role in resolving regional issues. Stresses between the strongest U.S. regional allies, Israel and Turkey, undermine U.S. interests.
- Facilitate Alternative Energy Technology Transfer: Turkey requires reliable energy sources to continue its domestic transformation. Development of alternative energy sources could reduce its dependency from external energy suppliers.
- Encourage Tourism. Turkey relies on tourism to offset trade imbalances. But tourism also enhances cultural exchanges and appreciation of Turkish culture. Increased tourism from the United States would increase Turk's exposure to western values and offset the cultural influence of increased tourism from the Middle East.

Conclusions

Turkey's domestic and foreign policies have caused some critics to conclude that Turkey is turning from a pro-West alliance. This perspective ignores Turkey's nearly century-long struggle to transform itself into a mature democracy, fully integrated into the European community. Turkey's foreign policy has historically responded to the changing geostrategic environment, as it has moved from isolation to neutrality, alignment, and engagement as needed to maintain its territorial integrity. Its contemporary foreign policies are consistent with those initiated during the 1960s.

Likewise, its domestic struggles have also reflected Ataturk's vision of an emerging functioning democracy, whose development would be determined by Turkey's ability to self-govern. Turkey's increased religious tolerance and subordination of the military to civilian control are consistent with its previous transformations. These democratic initiatives indicate that Turkey is ready to move forward in its democratic progress.

Current popular revolts on the Arab streets are denouncing decades of oppression in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, threatening to shred apart their governments. This turmoil in Arab Islamic countries underscores the wisdom of on-going U.S. support of Turkey's endeavors to continue its democratic maturation. Turkey's democratic initiatives are undeniable. They provide a progressive model for other Islamic countries: increased religious tolerance, greater tolerance of minority concerns, subordination of its military to civilian control, greater economic opportunity for its citizens, responsible diplomacy that promotes regional peace and stability.

U.S. Congressman Keith Ellison (D-Minnesota, and the only Muslim in the U.S. Congress), in testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, as he recounted the sacrifice of a Muslim first-responder who died in the line of duty when the Twin Towers collapsed, offered a valuable insight:

It is true that specific individuals, including some who are Muslims, are violent extremists. However, these are individuals but not entire communities...When their violent actions are associated with an entire community, then blame is assigned to a whole group. This is the very heart of stereotyping and scapegoating, which is counterproductive...Ascribing the evil acts of a few individuals to an entire community is wrong; it is ineffective, and it risks making our country less secure.⁸³

The U.S. misread Ho's ties to Communism and denied his request for support of an independent Vietnam. Ho later explained that "It was patriotism and not Communism that originally inspired me."⁸⁴ Failing to understand this, the U.S. lost a potential ally in a critical region. The U.S. should proceed cautiously to avoid committing the same mistakes with Turkey. U.S. leaders will be increasingly challenged to deal effectively with maturing democracies in Islamic countries like Turkey. Some of these have been longtime U.S. allies-even under questionable oppressive rule. If the U.S. is concerned about the vulnerability of a growing democracy to tilt toward political Islam because of the inherent fundamentals of a democracy, the United States should find ways to share common interests with them and continue to encourage their movement toward democracy.

Endnotes

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ George C. Herring, *Americas Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 5.

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⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 85.

¹⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stephen Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 40.

²³ Ibid., 32.

²⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁵ Ibid., 56.

²⁶ No Islamic symbol was too sacred to be banished. Women's veils and men's fez's were prohibited. Western style clothes were the new norm. In a few years, the Turkish language converted from an Arabic alphabet to a Latin one. Women were given the right to vote and hold office. Kemal knew his country must first purge itself of its oppressive past in order to transform his beloved nation into a modern state. Geoffrey Lewis, *Turkey* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1965), 93-102.

²⁷ Global Security, "Turkey Introduction."

²⁸ Global Security, "Turkey 1980 Evren Coup," <http://globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/tu-military-coup-1980.htm> (accessed March 13, 2011).

²⁹ William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy – 1774-2000* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000), 55.

³⁰ Turkey signed a series of protocols and neutrality agreements in Europe including Soviet Russia (1929), Italy (1928), and Greece (1930). Turkey signed the Saadabad Pact in 1937 with Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Ibid., 60-63.

³¹ Ibid., 111-113.

³² Global Security, "Turkey Introduction."

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³⁴ Ibid., 151.

³⁵ Ibid., 169-174.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 172.

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⁴¹ Ibid., 81.

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⁴⁴ Emiliano Alessandri, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy and the Future of Turkey-EU Relations," *The International Spectator* 45, no. 3 (September 2010): 87.

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⁵⁶ In an attempt to control criticism Erdogan has filed more than 100 lawsuits against 63 journalists, imprisoned journalists, and shuttered or heavily fined media outlets like Dogan. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Turkey's Future," *American Thinker*, <http://meforum.org/2753/turkey-future> (accessed December 2, 2010).

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⁶⁴ Kemal Kirisci, Nathalie Tocci, and Joshua Walker, *A Neighborhood Rediscovered-Turkey's transatlantic value in the Middle East* (Brussels, Belgium: German Marshall Fund United States, March 2010), 20-21, <http://brussels.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/BF2010-Paper-Kirisci-Tocci-Walker1.pdf> (accessed September, 2010).

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⁶⁷ Hasan Kosebalaban, "The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations: What Is Its Strategic Importance," *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 48.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Aliriza et al., *Turkey's Evolving Dynamics*, 65; Hill, "Seismic Shifts in Eurasia," 64.

⁷⁰ Aliriza et al., *Turkey's Evolving Dynamics*, 65.

⁷¹ Kosebalaban, "The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations," 47.

⁷² Kirisci, Tocci, and Walker, *A Neighborhood Rediscovered*, 9.

⁷³ Kosebalaban, "The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations," 44.

⁷⁴ Celik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*, 72.

⁷⁵ Nearly 45 percent of the Turkish International and Development Agency's budget is directed to Afghanistan reconstruction and Turkey has commanded ISAF at least twice, with great success. Kirisci, Tocci, and Walker, *A Neighborhood Rediscovered*, 16.

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⁷⁷ Christopher M. Blanchard et al., *Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research, October 6, 2009), 21, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33793.pdf> (accessed Oct, 2010); Aliriza et al., *Turkey's Evolving Dynamics*, 12.

⁷⁸ Carpenter, "Estrangement: The United States and Turkey in a Multipolar Era," 30.

⁷⁹ Blanchard et al., *Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*, 12.

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